

Message Text

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SUBJ: VOTE ON ADOPTION OF CONSTITUTION SCHEDULED FOR JUNE 6.

REF: ATHENS 3842

1. THE EVENING OF JUNE 2 THE PARLIAMENT DEBATED AND APPROVED ARTICLE 111, THE LAST REMAINING ARTICLE OF THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION WHICH DEALS WITH TRANSITIONAL MEASURES, THUS ENDING ITS ARTICLE-BY-ARTICLE CONSIDERATION OF THE CONSTITUTION. THE OPPOSITION PARTIES LAST EVENING CONTINUED THEIR BOYCOTT OF PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON THE CONSTITUTION, WHICH THEY HAD COMMENCED ON MAY 21 IN REACTION TO THE GOVERNMENT'S REFUSAL TO AMEND THE ARTICLE CONCERNING THE ELECTION OF ITS PRESIDENT (ATHENS 3793).

2. THE SCHEDULE NOW CALLS FOR THE PARLIAMENT TO VOTE ON THE ENTIRE CONSTITUTION ON FRIDAY, JUNE 6. ASSUMING ADOPTION, THE CONSTITUTION WILL COME INTO EFFECT ON JUNE 16 UPON ITS PUBLICATION IN THE OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT GAZETTE. UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF ARTICLE 111, THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC WILL BE ELECTED WITHIN TWO MONTHS OF THAT LATTER DATE (I.E. PRIOR TO AUGUST 16). ACCORDING TO SOME OBSERVERS, THE ELECTION WILL PROBABLY BE HELD TOWARDS THE END OF JUNE OR EARLY IN JULY (SEE FOR EXAMPLE

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ATHENS 4047).

3. SEVERAL RECENT CONVERSATIONS WE HAVE HAD WITH OPPOSITION AND ND DEPUTIES SUGGEST THAT THE OPPOSITION PARTIES WILL BOYCOTT THE FINAL VOTE ON THE ADOPTION OF THE CONSTITUTION. HOWEVER, WE UNDERSTAND THAT SOME BEHIND THE SCENES DISCUSSIONS ARE TAKING PLACE AND IT CANNOT BE EXCLUDED THAT THEY MIGHT PRODUCE SOME KIND OF COMPROMISE WHEREBY THE OPPOSITION WOULD PARTICIPATE IN THE FINAL VOTE ON THE CONSTITUTION IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

4. IN ANY EVENT, THE GOVERNMENT, AS THE DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, HAS THE VOTES TO ADOPT THE CONSTITUTION (A TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY OR 200 VOTES ARE REQUIRED - THE NEW DEMOCRACY PARTY HAS 216 SEATS IN THE PARLIAMENT). THE BIG QUESTION STILL REMAINS WHETHER CARAMANLIS WILL SEEK THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OR REMAIN AS PRIME MINISTER. NOBODY, PROBABLY INCLUDING CARAMANLIS HIMSELF, KNOWS AS OF NOW WHAT HE WILL DO. MOST OF THE BETTING IS ON HIS REMAINING AS PRIME MINISTER. UNDER THIS SCENARIO A TRUSTED FRIEND, SUCH AS PARLIAMENT PRESIDENT PAPACONSTANTINOU OR DEPUTY CONSTANTINOS TSATSOS, WOULD BE ELECTED PRESIDENT BUT REMAIN READY TO STEP ASIDE WHENEVER CARAMANLIS FEELS HE CAN RETIRE FROM THE PREMIERSHIP.

5. THIS, OF COURSE, IS THE ARGUMENT USED BY THE OPPOSITION IN OPPOSING THE PROVISION IN ARTICLE 32 THAT IN THE EVENT OF THE RESIGNATION (OR DEATH) OF THE PRESIDENT HIS REPLACEMENT WILL BE ELECTED TO A FULL FIVE-YEAR TERM (AND NOT ONLY TO FILL THE UNEXPIRED TERM AS THE OPPOSITION WANTED). IN ANY EVENT, THE CHANCES SEEM BETTER THAN EVEN TO US THAT PRIME MINISTER CARAMANLIS WILL OPT TO REMAIN AS PRIME MINISTER. HOWEVER, HE HAS ANOTHER TWO MONTHS TO DECIDE, IF HE WANTS TO WAIT, AND ONE CANNOT BE SURE UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE WHAT HIS DECISION WILL BE.
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